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AUTHOR Ganser, Tom

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ABSTRACT

The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater requires early field experience of preservice teachers. As part of the Preprofessional Block, students are assigned to a 50-hour classroom experience shadowing a Milwaukee public school teacher. The university provides transportation to the site at a cost of $65 to each student. A survey of students participating over five semesters examined: (1) their feelings about being assigned to special education classrooms (for those assigned there); (2) ways that the field experience influenced their beliefs about teaching and learning; (3) things they learned about teaching that they might not have learned otherwise; and (4) their observations about the experience in general. Overall, students found the field experience worthwhile but not without problems. Many problems related to early field experiences in general and to the program's specific logistical arrangements. The most satisfied students usually noted good cooperating teachers and assignments to grades or content areas in which they intended to teach. The most dissatisfied students described their cooperating teachers as burned out or poor teachers. The fact that the program offered students guided access to urban schools that they might not have had otherwise was recognized as an advantage. (Contains 29 references). (SM)

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Running head: VIEWS OF STUDENTS

The Views of Students in an Early Field Experience: Mixed Messages

Tom Ganser

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

October 16, 1997

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Tom Ganser, Director
Office of Field Experiences
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Whitewater, Wisconsin 53190-1790
Telephone: (414) 472-1123
FAX: (414) 472-5716
Internet: gansert@uwwvax.uww.edu

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The Views of Students in an Early Field Experience: Mixed Messages

Early field experiences have become a universal feature of teacher preparation. A study of 90 members of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education in 1990 revealed that teacher candidates spent 65 to more than 100 hours in early field experiences (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1991). In some states, the required number of early field experience hours is far greater, as in Ohio where the requirement is 300 hours.

Considering the wide-spread perceived value of the student teaching experience (Watts, 1987), it is understandable that other experiences requiring time in classrooms are also viewed favorably. More importantly, beliefs about the value of early field experiences have been transformed into licensing requirements by state departments of education (AACTE, 1991; Lanier & Little, 1986;) and are reflected in accreditation expectations (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1995).

Early field experiences are intended to serve several purposes. They provide teacher candidates with opportunities for career exploration. They are also typically linked to specific education courses and are intended to bridge the gap between theory and classroom practice (Bishoff, Farris, & Henniger, 1988; Cannon & Scharmann, 1996; Curtner-Smith, 1996; Passe, 1994; Pierce, 1996). Increasingly, early field experiences are also

intended to prepare prospective teachers for work in multicultural, diverse school settings (Fry & McKinney, 1997; Gay, 1996; Gollnick, 1995; Hudson, 1993).

As a practical matter, early field experiences are often designed to meet state licensing requirements, including clock hours spent in schools before student teaching. Although program objectives may focus on the progression of early experiences, e.g., moving from passive "observation" of teaching to active "participation" in teaching, state licensing requirements tend to place greater emphasis on hours spent in classrooms and less on what happens during that time. Most importantly, early field experiences, like student teaching, socialize prospective teachers for their roles in the classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Howey & Zimpher, 1996; Zeichner & Gore, 1990).

The limitations associated with student teaching (Ganser, 1996; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Knowles & Cole, 1996) are present in early field experiences as well. The role of the cooperating teacher is frequently ambiguous (Kagan & Warren, 1991-92) and conducted with little preparation and few incentives (AACTE, 1991). Equally problematic is providing university supervision that is both appropriate to early field experiences (Potthoff & Kline, 1995) and economically viable within the context of limited resources.

The Preprofessional Block Field Experience

The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater is the second largest producer of teachers in Wisconsin among 33 schools, colleges, or

departments of education. Since Fall, 1991, undergraduate education majors have begun their sequence of teacher education courses with enrollment in the Preprofessional Block (Ganser, 1996b; Epps, 1997; Epps & Ganser, 1993). This block includes enrollment in three three-credit courses: (1) Education in a Pluralistic Society, (2) Child Development or Educational Psychology (depending on major), and (3) Observation and Participation

As part of the Preprofessional Block, students are assigned to a 50 hour classroom experience shadowing a classroom teacher in a Milwaukee public school. Milwaukee Public Schools serves approximately 100,000 students in 155 schools. The experience includes eight full days in the school. During each semester, a small number of students in the Preprofessional Block participate in Project STREAM [Support, Training, and Resources for Educating Able Minorities], an alternative field experience in which education majors shadow middle school students (Clasen, 1993; Clasen, Middleton, & Connell, 1994). During the fall semester, the trips to Milwaukee occur over eight consecutive weeks, beginning the fifth week of the semester; during the spring semester, the trips are scheduled over a period of nine or ten weeks due to spring vacation periods.

Before the trips to Milwaukee begin, students meet in classes for their courses on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and continue to do so on Thursdays once the trips begin. During the trips, students meet in small groups either at school sites or on campus

on Thursdays. After the final trip, students once again meet in their classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Supervision is provided primarily by regular university faculty who are assigned to two or three schools. Supervisors generally visit their assigned school during at least four of the trips and usually seven or eight times. Cooperating teachers are provided with a list of suggested activities for their UW-W students and are required to complete an evaluation form consisting of three detailed likert-type scale items and ample space for additional comments.

Students are assessed a fee (currently $65) for transportation to and from the assigned schools located approximately 50 miles from campus. Transportation is provided by chartered school buses or state-owned vans driven by students who are enrolled in the Preprofessional Block and successfully complete a state requires van driving training workshop. Students are not permitted to provide their own transportation and are not allowed to leave the field site during the day

The 50 hours spent in a Milwaukee school partially fulfill two requirements for obtaining a teaching license from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. First, the hours are counted toward pre-student teaching hours (100 required for regular education majors and 200 required for special education majors). Second, the hours also fulfill a portion of the human relations requirement ("fifty documented clock hours of involvement"). Successful completion of Education in a Pluralistic Society and of a methods course which includes the

topic of conflict resolution fulfills the other human relations requirements. Finally the Preprofessional Block is a pre-requisite for admission into Professional Education and continuing enrollment in education courses.

Several considerations are taken into account in making placements. The primary consideration is to meet state requirements for pre-student teaching hours and human relations. The pre-student teaching hours requirement specifies that special education majors are <u>not</u> to be placed in special education classrooms. However, all special education majors have a minimum of two experiences with special education populations after the Preprofessional Block and before student teaching. Regular education majors may be assigned to any type of classroom. The human relations requirement specifies a diverse, multicultural setting, but not grade level or type of classroom. These licensing requirements are outlined for students at the first meeting of Observation and Participation.

There are a host of practical considerations and "administrative feasibility" issues (Myers, 1996) that influence how placements are determined. These include depending on students enrolled in the program to serve as van drivers, offering students two locations en route from campus to Milwaukee at which they can be picked up and dropped off, minimizing transportation costs by maximizing the capacity of vans or buses, using 12 to 14 different schools with different schedules, and aiming to have students at their assigned schools shortly before

the beginning of the school day and until shortly after the end of the school day. Other considerations taken into account include facilitating the work of supervisors with respect to time and distance, and maintaining continuity in use of sites. Placing students also requires sensitivity to the "saturation" level of schools as sites for 26 different teacher preparation institutions placing students in Milwaukee.

During the program's six year history, only rarely have prospective cooperating teachers expressed preferences or stipulated requirements for the students assigned to them, e.g., "business education major only," "prefer male," "must speak Spanish." In addition, a small number of students have been placed in content areas (e.g., technical education, consumer education) unrelated to any of the majors offered at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in response to practical needs, e.g., minimizing transportation costs by maximizing numbers of students transported in a vehicle.

Method

This study is based on responses to open-ended items included on a survey distributed to students participating in the Preprofessional Block field experience as they boarded their assigned bus or van for their eighth and final trip into Milwaukee. Specifically, it is based on survey distributed by students participating in the program during Fall 1994 (n=118), Spring 1995 (n=156), Fall 1995 (n=141), Fall 1996 (n=168) and Spring 1997 (n=156).

The prompts for these items and the semesters in which they were included in the survey were:

1. If you were assigned to a special education classroom, what other comments do you have about being assigned to a special education classroom for your O & P [observation and participation] field experience? (Fall 1994, Spring 1995, Fall 1995, Fall 1996, Spring 1997)
2. What are up to three ways in which your field experience in Milwaukee has influenced your beliefs about effective teaching, how children learn, teaching as a profession, working in schools, and/or your own abilities as a future teacher? (Fall 1996, Spring 1997)
3. What is something that you learned about teaching that you don't think you could have learned without having had this experience? (Fall 1996, Spring 1997)
4. What other comments do you have about your O & P field experience in general? Or recommendations for program improvement? (Fall 1994, Spring 1995, Fall 1995, Fall 1996, Spring 1997).

The response rate for Item 1 (which could only be answered by a small number of regular education majors assigned to special education classrooms) ranged from approximately 16% to approximately 68% and included a total of 46 responses. The response rate for Item 2 was 25.6% (n=43) for Fall 1996 and 55.8%

(n=87) for Spring 1997. The response rate for Item 3 was 25.0% (n=42) for Fall 1996 and 52.6% (n=82) for Spring 1997. The response rate for Item 4 ranged from 49.4% (n=77) for Spring 1997 to 24.4% (n=41) for Fall 1996 and included a total of 314 responses.

The responses were analyzed for emergent categories following standard qualitative research methods (Goetz & LeCompte, 1985). Two peer debriefers (Lincoln & Guba, 1983) were provided with copies of the data and assisted the researcher in establishing the analytical categories.

Findings

Program Issues

Placement.

The analysis of the data revealed that 85 comments related to the match between the students' majors (viz., PreK-Grade 6, Grades 1-6, Grades 1-9, Grades 6-12, Grades K-12 [art, music, physical education], or Special Education [Behavioral/Emotional Disabilities, Early Childhood:Exceptional Educational Needs, Learning Disabilities, Mental Retardation/Cognitive Disabilities] and their preferences, and the type of classrooms in which they were placed for this early field experience.

In those instances in which the students were explicit in stating their opinion about the appropriateness of the match between major and type of classroom, five students linked their positive opinion of their placement with their preferences or their major. One (Fall 1994) PreK-Grade 6 (hereafter PreK-6)

major commented, "I was very pleased with my placement because I was placed in a classroom of which I would like to teach someday. It encouraged me to pursue a career in kindergarten" and a K-Grade 12 (hereafter K-12) specialist major (Fall 1995) commented, "I was very happy I got an art room, because my major is art education."

In the case of four students explicitly criticizing their placements, they cited the discrepancy between their major and their placement. A (Fall 1995) K-12 music education major placed in a special education class claimed the experience "Did not prepare me at all for a position in instrumental music K-12. Had I been in a regular (math, science, etc.) classroom, it probably would have been helpful though." A (Spring 1995) K-12 physical education major placed in a regular education elementary classroom, wrote, "I was also placed in an elementary classroom, when I am a physical education secondary emphasis major. This placement was the complete opposite of what I intend to do." It should be noted that the only licensure program in physical education available is for grades K through 12 and there is no "secondary emphasis."

A small number of students (n=6) indicated they initially felt their placement was inappropriate, but later changed their mind. According to one (Fall 1994) Grades 1-9 major (hereafter 1-9), "When I first learned of my assignment, I wasn't too sure if I would like it or not. But it turned out to be a great experience." She continues, "Before this I would have never

thought of teaching at a middle school. Now I think it would be something I would like to do." Even a (Spring 1997) PreK-6 major placed in a middle school, who admitted "I was scared and didn't like that I was placed in a middle school," commented, "I loved the experience and cried the last day. I would definitely go back to student teach or teach at the middle school if my certification enabled me to."

Many students indicated that students should have the option of electing to be placed in a classroom of their choice or at least that they are always placed in their major area. Students who were placed in their area were generally pleased. A (Fall 1994) K-12 major commented, "I had a wonderful time being assigned to a classroom in my field area. It was to my <u>great</u> advantage."

Special education majors, in particular, were often displeased at not being placed in a special education classroom. Their reasons fell into two categories. Some special education majors suggested that placement in a regular education classroom was inappropriate because "Most of us [i.e., special education majors] know how a regular education classroom is run" (Spring 1995, Early Educational Needs [hereafter EEN]). A second reason cited by special education majors who indicated dissatisfaction with placement in a regular education classroom was their unfamiliarity with the area of special education in general. This is evident in the comments of a (Fall 1995) Learning Disabilities (hereafter LD) major: "Personally, as a special

education major, I feel I need more time spent in a special education classroom because I still don't have a clear picture of what a special education teacher does." A similar comments was provided by a (Fall 1994) Mental Retardation/ Cognitive Disability major (hereafter MR), who opted for at least half of the time spent in a special education classroom. "I would have liked to have seen that side of the spectrum," she wrote. "I have been in regular education all of my life. I'd like to see the other side of the hill." An Emotional Disturbances/ Behavioral Disabilities (hereafter ED) major commented, "I was very disappointed I didn't receive any experience in my field." She added, "I don't feel it is fair to have my first field experience in a class with ED students for my student teaching."

The even stronger message communicated by students was that there should be more variety in this early field experience. The variety suggested took different formats. Some students suggested that the trips to the schools be on days of the week in addition to Tuesdays. For example, a (Fall 1994) PreK-6 major suggested, "Maybe go on a different day, like Monday or Friday, to see what the kids are like before or after the weekend." Several regular education majors suggested that regular education majors should have some exposure to special education classrooms, as revealed in the comments of one (Spring 1995) Grades 6-12 (hereafter 6-12) major: "Everyone going into education should be required to spend some time in a special education class. The chance of having students with special needs in a regular

classroom is very probable. The experience is eye-opening."

Other recommendations for increasing the variation in the field experience included assigning students to different classrooms in the same school, to more than one level of school in Milwaukee (e.g., an elementary school and a middle school), and to schools in suburban or rural school districts in addition to Milwaukee. One reason for this was the opportunity to see different teachers working with different groups of children. Another reasons was linked to career decision, as suggested in the comments of a (Fall 1994) double major in regular and special education: "I strongly believe that in order for everyone to have a beneficial experience with O & P [Observation and Participation], we should be able to observe other grades and other schools to give those who aren't sure about their major a better perspective of what exactly they're getting into and to help others decide which age group or which area they'd like to teach."

Roles and Responsibilities.

Thirty-four comments related to issues regarding the selection of cooperating teachers, and their roles, responsibilities, and expectations. An additional 36 comments presented a negative portrayal of cooperating teachers as "burned out" and ineffective.

Several students questioned the procedures for selecting cooperating teachers and recommended instituting more rigorous procedures for screening out negative, ineffective teachers to

serve as cooperating teachers. For example, a (Fall 1994) 6-12 major commented, "The biggest problem I had with my O & P experience was with the cooperating teacher. She was negative and very burnt out. I think it is important to screen the teachers before placing UW-W students in their classrooms" and a (Fall 1995) MR major recorded, "There were only a handful of teachers who weren't suffering burnout. This frightens me a lot!" Describing something she learned as a result of this field experience, a (Spring 1997) PreK-6 major remarked that "Teachers have to know when to quit. I have now seen teachers that are burnt out and should move on to something other than teaching." Although a (Fall 1994) PreK-6 major wrote "I had a wonderful experience." She also added, "Many of the other students said that their teachers acted as if they didn't even want O & P students. I'd recommend that you find a way to screen out teachers like that!"

Although students are officially assigned to one cooperating teacher, it is permissible and even recommended that they spend time with other teachers as well, if possible. Accordingly, in some cases, a negative experience with the "assigned" cooperating teacher was balanced with more positive experiences with other teachers. This is evident in the statement of a (Spring 1997) PreK-6 major who wrote: "While I was working with one cooperating teacher, I found that her teaching ability (to me) was not satisfying. She was burnt out and negative towards the students. During the 8 days I was in Milwaukee I visited other

classrooms of the same and different grades. These teachers did not mind and I learned a great deal by visiting others and learning their teaching abilities."

More importantly, dissatisfaction with cooperating teachers was often (n=24) associated with their apparently meager understanding of program objectives and expectations. For instance, a (Fall 1995) K-12 major wrote: "I suggest a screening process to determine why the teacher wants to have an O & P student. If they just want a worker bee to grade papers to someone to help them in managing their own classroom, they will not help the O & P student at all." A (Spring 1995) elementary and special education double major wrote "I do not feel my teacher fully understood what O & P was. She was very confused." Similarly, a (Fall 1994) 1-9 major reported that "My teacher was surprised when I told her this was my first direct experience in a teacher role." One (Fall 1996) PreK-6 major placed in a Grades 2-5 ED classroom commented: "I was given no authority in the classroom; in return, I got no respect from the students, but was still expected to participate as though I did. This created great problems. I was not only not given respect from my students, but none from my teacher either. She referred to me as a flunky to another teacher, in front of myself and the students as well as the other teacher."

Alternatively, students who expressed satisfaction with the field experience suggested that their cooperating teachers understood the program objectives, at least in terms of providing

opportunities to sample various dimensions of the work of teachers. For instance, a (Fall 1994) 1-9 major wrote: "I was extremely pleased with my experience and I wish everyone could follow a similar pattern. The first four times I observed and corrected papers. The last four times I taught one class. I developed lesson plans and only I covered this area. I gave worksheets and a test which I created."

Not surprisingly, the students who were most satisfied with the quality of their field experience often linked it very directly with a positive assessment of their cooperating teacher. "I had a very positive experience," wrote a (Fall 1995) K-12 major. "I worked with a very dynamic and enthusiastic teacher that taught me a lot." Likewise, a (Spring 1997) PreK-6 major wrote, "I loved this program. It is something that everyone should go through. My teacher was awesome and more helpful than she'll ever know."

Far less common than comments regarding cooperating teachers were comments (n=11) regarding the roles and responsibilities of students and university personnel in the field experience program. In terms of both students and their cooperating teachers, a (Fall 1994) PreK-6 major recommended having "a specific agenda set for students and/or teachers, so they both have an idea of what they should be doing." In the opinion of a (Fall 1995) PreK-6 major, "I think that it is important for the supervisor to become more involved with the UW students. Simply peeking into the room does not give him/her a good enough

impression of how we are doing." The director of field experiences was criticized for the policy on making up absences and, along with supervisors, with respect to approachability: "Our representatives need to be more approachable, for our advisor to the top" (Fall 1994, 6-12).

Other Program Features.

Beyond determination of specific placements and the selection and roles of cooperating teachers, there were relatively few other comments about the design and implementation of the field experience, alone and as part of the Preprofessional Block. There were 27 comments regarding the number of trips or hours required for the field experience. Whereas five students recommended fewer trips (e.g., "I really believe that going to Milwaukee eight times is too much," Fall 1996, 6-12), fourteen students recommended more trips or at least additional time at the schools before and after the school day, generally in order to develop a closer relationship with the children in the class. According to a (Fall 1995) 6-12 major, the scheduled trips did not provide "enough time to get to know students and have any kind of rapport with them. I wasn't able to see any kind of progress with students." Other students recommended the same number of trips, but on two days per week for four weeks rather than one day a week for eight weeks.

Logistical considerations, such as the travel time from the university to sites approximately 50 miles away and intended to provide a full school day elicited 11 comments. Two (Spring

1995) 6-12 majors provided comments about this. One wrote: "One recommendation: the way was too long. Being gone from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. completed exhausted [me] and for only 3 credits. Maybe you could shorten the hours per day that we stay at the school." Another commented, "The schedule is horrible and is difficult to adjust from a 'college' schedule the other 6 days of the week." Noting that sometimes motor coach buses were used instead of regular yellow school buses, two students even wondered why theirs was not a motor coach, not knowing that the bus provider sent a motor coach due to contractual obligations.

Students provided only a handful of comments (n=10) regarding other aspects of the program, including such things as a recommendation for on-site small group meetings at placement sites, meeting with school administrators at the schools, and not being able to meet with the cooperating teacher before the first trip or to make up the only trip ever cancelled during the eleven semesters that the program has been in operation: "I'm very upset that we don't get to make-up the last day that was cancelled. We didn't get to say good-bye" (Fall 1995, PreK-6). Perhaps the most substantive of these comments on miscellaneous program issues dealt with the simple evaluation form, consisting of five likert-scale items and space for additional comments, completed by the cooperating teacher. One (Spring 1995) 6-12 major reported, "I believe the program is a good experience, but I am disappointed with how the teachers fill out the 'end of experience' survey. They do not put a lot of weight on it and

most of who [sic, for `students'] I spoke to did not talk it over with their teachers."

Teaching

Career Decision

Many comments revealed that the Preprofessional Block field experience provides students with an opportunity "to look within myself and ask if I really felt that I have what it takes to teach" (Fall 1994, 6-12). In 33 comments, it appears that this early field experience serves to reinforce their career decision to become a teacher, as expressed in the comments of a (Spring 1997) PreK-6 major who wrote, "I believe after O & P that I have within me what it takes to become a teacher." The comments of nine students highlighted the value of the experience in schools and as a complement to course work in reaching this conclusion. In this regard, a (Spring 1995) 6-12 major reported, "I'm glad I was able to see first hand what being a teacher will be like" and a (Fall 1996) MR major wrote, "The experience was <u>invaluable</u>. Nothing like it could be taught in any class."

In many instances, students suggested that the needs of children confirmed their decision, as suggested in the comments provided by a (Spring 1997) 6-12 major: "I want to become a teacher even more than I did because the children need someone who is willing and able to teach them." Occasionally, children's needs were also associated with poor teaching. For example, a (Spring 1997) K-12 major wrote, "I was sad to leave my school. I will miss the students and I wished I would have had more time to

bond with them." She goes on to add, "I didn't want those students and future students to be left under his instruction. Seeing his poor teaching styles made me more eager to get in the classroom and make a positive difference."

Sometimes students placed the emphasis squarely on their perceptions regarding the potential for teaching in general to influence children. "I also learned what a difference a teacher can make, that his/her role is extremely influential" wrote a (Spring 1997) K-12 major, and according to a (Fall 1996) 1-9 major, "My field experience in Milwaukee convinced me that teaching, as a profession, can have an amazing impact on a child's life. The limits are endless." Less frequently, students anchored their comments in a specific grade or grade level, as in the case of a (Fall 1995) PreK-6 major who wrote, "This program is a great idea because it helped me get on track and it also helped me decide what grade I want to teach" and another (Fall 1995) PreK-6 major who commented, "I wish I would have been placed in a grade at which I will be certified to teach. On the other hand, I guess it reinforced the idea that I won't want to teach eighth grade."

Although 15 comments suggested that the experience enhanced students' confidence, a small number of students explicitly stated that this early field experience caused them to doubt their abilities or to entirely change their mind about becoming a teacher. For example, a (Fall 1996) PreK-6 major commented, "I learned that I don't want to teach anymore. I loved the kids and

such, but don't think teaching is for me!" whereas a (Spring 1997) 6-12 major wrote, "I question my abilities 100% to do the job I saw. I witnessed people who I believed were good, effective teachers snap at times. I also saw a brand new teacher (just graduated) struggle. If these people (some with experience) can't do this, how can I?" More typically, the experience appeared to confirm teaching as a career choice and also to highlight the need for additional preparation. For example, a (Spring 1997) 1-9 major wrote, "I've discovered I've got a lot to learn and accomplish before I begin teaching." Similarly, a (Fall 1996) 1-9 major stressed that the experience "did certainly show that I need a lot more experience within the schools and in front of the children."

The Work of Teachers

Many comments recorded by students focused on the nature of teaching as a profession and the work of teachers. Particularly salient were impressions (n=36) of teaching as a very demanding and stressful occupation. A (Spring 1997) 6-12 major observed that teaching "is a very demanding job, and people need to be sure they are up for the challenge before they become teachers." Some students were more specific in describing their perceptions of the demands of teaching. For example, a(Fall 1996) LD major commented that "Most of those teachers come in early in the morning and stay long past the time the kids leave" and a (Spring 1997) 6-12 major noted that "Teaching is a never ending job. Even during teachers' breaks, they are often calling parents,

attending meetings, grading papers, writing lesson plans, etc." Ten comments suggested that teachers have many roles and responsibilities that extend beyond teaching. A (Fall 1996) LD major, for instance, felt that her experience "Taught me that teachers take on a lot of roles: caregiver, educator, counselor, friend, authoritarian, disciplinarian" and a (Spring 1997) 6-12 major concluded that "Teaching involves many duties in a school besides just class lessons. These include filling in when necessary, working with faculty or administration, as well as other procedural duties."

As a result of this field experiences, some students gained "a new respect for teaching" (Spring 1997, 6-12) and discover its rewards. "There's nothing better," observed a (Spring 1997) ED major, "than getting a hug from a second grader after they have had a bad morning and the hug comes out of the blue!"

The analysis of the data revealed three aspects of teaching that frequently emerged during the students' comments: classroom management, discipline, and control (n=36), interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, among teachers, and between teachers and administrators (n=54), and the need to individualize instruction to meet differences in learning style, motivation, and background (n=104).

With rare exceptions, comments about classroom management and discipline emphasized strictness and heavy control, both for the sake of effective teaching ("Effective teaching requires control of the students. Classroom control is the key factor to

success," Spring 1997, 6-12) and for the sake of teachers ("Classroom management is extremely important. Those teacher who seem frustrated and burnt out have poor classroom management techniques," Spring 1997, 6-12). For many students, the experience changed their mind about the need for discipline, as evident in the comments of one (Spring 1997) PreK-6 major who wrote: "To be an effective teacher I realized you must be more firm, strict, and mean. When I arrived at the school I was shocked to see how mean and strict the teachers were. But after my second trip I realized that was the only way the students would listen. I was told my many teachers to be firm of the students will walk all over you."

Only rarely did comments about discipline and management reflect a more moderate approach. For example, although noting that "Children will learn with a more strict teacher," a PreK-6 student went on to add, "However, being mean will not get you anywhere." A similar comment was offered by a (Spring 1997) 6-12 major, who commented that teaching is "not totally about controlling a child. If you spend too much time worrying about that, nothing gets done."

Offering a balance to comments about discipline and management that emphasized a heavy-handed approach were comments which stressed the place of good interpersonal relationships in teaching, especially between teachers and their students, but also among teachers and between teachers and other professionals working in schools. Several comments highlighted a connection

between discipline and caring. For example, a (Fall 1996) 6-12 major noted that "There are times when you need to be strict with kids, but there are also times when you need to show care and support." Other comments suggested that effective teaching depends on a positive relationship between teacher and students which shows evidence of mutual respect. "In order to be an effective teacher," noted a (Spring 1997) 1-9 major, "the students must like and respect you." A (Spring 1997) 6-12 major expressed a similar sentiment: "Through my experience, I have learned that to be a teacher one must reach a common understanding or trust with the students, and I accomplished that with some kids and I felt great about it. Teaching, here I come."

On a few occasions students referred to professional relationships between teachers and other professionals working in schools. For example, one (Spring 1997) 6-12 major noted that through the experience she "learned about team teaching and integrating concepts for lessons across math, reading, and art." Another student commented, "I didn't realize that teachers have special sessions with other teachers and social workers about problem students" (Spring 1997, 1-9).

The most frequent comments of the students about teaching related to the importance of adjusting teaching to meet the learning needs of all children. Thirty-four comments stressed different learning styles and different rates of learning. Sometimes this proved to be a significant revelation for the student. "I have seen for the first time, first hand, that

students learn in different ways and at different levels," observed a (Spring 1997) 6-12 major, adding, "I knew this was true but have never seen it on this level. I have learned that teachers have to vary teaching styles." Suggesting a naive image of teaching, a (Spring 1997) EEN major wrote, "I learned that I will have to be able to teach all children at different levels. I once thought that we would be teaching children of the same level."

For some students, this early field experience helped them at least to get a sense of the complexity of teaching, as evident in the comments of a (Fall 1996) PreK-6 major: "The field experience opened my eyes on all the multitude of ways different children learn. And the variety of ways to teach these children." "Children learn at different rates, different levels, and in a variety of methods (visual, verbal, hands-on), and the teacher may need to attempt to identify how each child learns (Fall 1996, 6-12).

Comments also revealed the that students recognized the importance of motivation in student learning. A (Fall 1996) 1-9 major concluded, "When students want to learn, they do learn. Therefore it is my job to get children to want to learn. They will do the rest" and a (Spring 1997) K-12 major discovered the value of keeping activities "interesting . . . for the students so they are more motivated to learn." Other comments suggested the value of "giving students some power and attention" (Fall 1996, K-12) in determining how they best learn and accepting that

"Children can learn in what some may call chaos" (Fall 1996, 6-12) and that "Learning can take place in a noisy and wild classroom" (Fall 1996, LD).

Many of the 35 comments about the background of students or about diversity in general, suggested that teachers must take this into account in they are to be effective teachers. In order to reach students, commented a (Fall 1996) 6-12 major, "Teachers must be open to accepting their students' cultural differences and open to changing their styles to be more responsible to the children's needs." A (Spring 1997) Perk-6 major observed, "The program showed me how each child bring in `baggage' or background that, as a teacher, I need to be aware of."

In two instances, students discounted race differences as basically irrelevant. "The difference in races really doesn't make a difference," commented a (Spring 1997) LD major. She added, "Kids are all the same." Another student who claimed that "race, ethnicity, religion, etc., has nothing to do with how you teach" (Fall 1996, 1-9), did, however, add an exception: "It does, however, deal with how you know the students' needs." At the opposite extreme, a (Fall 1996) Perk-6 major noted: "I really liked working with the diversity of my students. They were great and fun. Different races learn and think differently."

At the very least, many of the comments emerging out of the brief look into classrooms provided by this early experience suggest that viewing effective teaching as monolithic is

untenable. "I've learned that there is no one right way to be an effective teacher," reflected a (Spring 1997) 6-12 major. "Teachers must alter their plans to fit how students learn. Teachers must be creative and flexible in order for their students to be motivated to learn." In a similar spirit, a (Fall 1996) K-12 major commented: "I have learned, or rather confirmed, that there are many different effective teaching styles as they are teachers and that each style has its own inherent strengths and weaknesses. As teachers, we must be able to use parts of each style to find the approach that best serves the student." Taken together, the many comments on learning styles, motivation, and background suggest the emergence of a more complex picture of teaching that may begin to dislodge an image or fantasy of teaching held by prospective teachers that is overly simplistic and not very realistic.

Teaching in Milwaukee

Milwaukee Public Schools is a large urban school district with an enrollment of about 100,000 students and approximately 6,000 teachers working in over 150 schools. As such, the early field experience there clearly meets the human relations requirement for "direct contact hours." Moreover, the school district is very different from the small town, rural school districts where many UW-Whitwater students receive their education.

Spending time in an urban school like Milwaukee Public Schools was indeed an "eye-opening" experience for many students,

and this was expressed in many comments, like those of a (Spring 1995) 6-12 major, who wrote: "I believe the experience served exactly the purpose intended. Coming from a rural background, the inner city experience has been an eye-opener." Some comments (n=5) emphasized MPS as different from the schools students had themselves attended. For instance, a (Spring 1995) student wrote, "I was happy with my placement at [name of school]. It gave me an opportunity to see an educational setting which was very different from anything I had been exposed to." A (Spring 1997) EEN major commented, "I found that teaching in a city like Milwaukee is very different than teaching in a village like Menomonee Falls where I sent to school."

Viewing Milwaukee schools as "different," some students suggested that that difference results in a different kind of teaching. "I learned how different teaching in an inner city school can be," commented a (Spring 1997) PreK-6 major. In a similar spirit, a (Fall 1996) LD major wrote, "Urban schools require a different method of teaching than suburban schools."

Other students' comments emphasized that the children in Milwaukee are no different than any other children when it comes to learning or requiring attention. A (Fall 1996) 6-12 major reflected, "Being from a small school myself, I learned that urban kids are just as smart," and a (Spring 1997) 6-12 major commented, "Inner city are not all drugged up, evil brats. They just need love and attention like any kid." At the same time, other comments emphasized that at least children in an urban

setting may face more challenges and have "far more obstacles littering their paths toward learning" (Fall 1996, K-12).

Other comments focused on Milwaukee schools rather than urban schools in general. For example, a (Spring 1995) special education major wrote, "I really enjoyed going to MPS. I really learned a lot and it was great to experience a classroom." More typically, comments suggested an alteration in preconceptions about schools in Milwaukee. In this regard, a (Fall 1996) PreK-6 major observed, "I think it was a great experience. Going to Milwaukee eases my mind, now that I know what it is like. Not as bad as I expected" and a (Fall 1996) 1-9 major commented, "My field experience in Milwaukee changed my opinion of MPS. I was amazed at the positive atmosphere. Not to mention the wonderful building as a whole." Some students also expressed admiration for hard-working urban teachers.

Few comments focused on specific issues about the organization and structure of schools that could be described as uniquely urban or limited to Milwaukee. There were six comments only that alluded to large class size, the use of instructional aides, or the process of inclusion.

In a few instances, students indicated an interest in someday teaching in Milwaukee or another urban school district. For example, a (Fall 1995) EEN major commented, "I really enjoyed my experience and wish it would have been longer. I think all teachers or people training to be teachers should experience MPS. After my experience I feel I would enjoy teaching in MPS and feel

I could make a difference." Other students suggested a need for more or specialized preparation for teaching in an urban district like Milwaukee. "I know inner city schools are not for me right now," wrote a (Spring 1997) 6-12 major. "Maybe I will consider the inner city after some experience." A similar comment was recorded by another (Spring 1997) 6-12 major: "I feel I would need more preparation if I decided to teach in an urban school." Among all the students, only two directly stated that they would never consider teaching in an urban school district.

Discussion

The data upon which this study is based includes 314 general comments on the Preprofessional Block field experience written by students in the program over five semesters. Assigning a value to each comment on a five-point scale to reflect how positive or negative the comment is (5=very positive, 4=positive, 3=neutral, 2=negative, 1=very negative) results in a mean value of 3.85. This confirms the overall impression that, by and large, the students found the field experience to be worthwhile but not without some problems, many of which are related to early field experiences in general and to the logistical arrangements of this program in particular.

The students who expressed the greatest satisfaction with their experience, or felt that it was very appropriate, usually emphasized a having good cooperating teacher and frequently mentioned being assigned to a grade or content area in which they intended to teach. The students most displeased described their

cooperating teacher as "burned out" or providing examples of how not to teach.

Two complex issues are embedded in students' expressions of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their placement. First, the primary goal of this field experience is to provide students with an opportunity to spend time observing children and teachers interacting in a multicultural, diverse school setting in fulfillment of a human relations requirement. Another goal of the program is for some limited "participation" in teaching for students during their first field experience and have almost no formal preparation for teaching, including methods courses. Students are informed of this at the beginning of the semester. They are also informed of the value of learning about the sequence of schooling, from preschool through senior high school, for a teacher who happens to be working at a specific grade.

Not surprisingly, however, the students carry with themselves into this experience very strong beliefs about what kind of teacher they will be and for which they should be preparing. Rather than view themselves as preparing to be an elementary teacher or a secondary teacher, they view themselves as preparing to be a first grade regular education teacher, a middle school learning disabilities teacher, or a high school math teacher. The obligation of a teacher preparation program, however, is to prepare prospective teachers for a broad licensing span, not for their preferences. In fact, some students' dissatisfaction gives evidence of a misunderstanding of the

specific teaching licenses for which they are preparing, for example, a specialist preparing for a K-12 license who believes she will be teaching in a secondary setting only or a special education major who does not understand the requirement of field experience hours spent in a "regular" education classroom.

The second complex issue centers on logistical matters that limit the degrees of freedom in selecting school sites and cooperating teachers. At a distance of approximately 50 miles, Milwaukee is the nearest urban school district to the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater that can readily accommodate the large number of students that must be placed for this early field experience, about 160 students per semester during recent years. Students are not permitted to transport themselves to their assigned schools because of distance, unreliable automobiles, limited parking, and unfamiliarity with the city.

The transportation arrangements also represent an effort to minimize students entering schools at different times rather than as a group, in order to minimize disturbance in the schools and in response to security concerns. In addition, limitations as to how many schools (generally two) a bus or van can travel to and still enable students to spend an entire day at the school and the need to cover the costs of transportation result in the need to place large numbers of students at individual schools. The net result is that whatever care might be exercised in terms of selecting cooperating teachers is compromised. Informally, principals and other school personnel who seek teachers to

volunteer to work with students in this experience work with the director field experiences to avoid placing students with poor teachers, but the comments of students suggest that this is with limited success.

Typical of the sequence of field experiences in teacher preparation programs in general, greater care is exercised in selecting sites and cooperating teachers in subsequent field experiences and especially for student teaching. In addition, sites for these later field experiences are generally closer to the university and students are responsible for their own transportation. Finally, the objectives of these field experiences are much more directly related to teaching than are the objectives of the Preprofessional Block field experience. As a result, the match between what students view as appropriate to their preparation and what their assignments are predictably closer than is the case in the first field experience.

In spite of the limitations of the Preprofessional Block field experience, there are some very clear positive outcomes of the experience, beyond merely meeting a state mandate. First, the experience does provide students, many of whom grew up in small towns or rural areas, with systematic and guided access to urban schools they might never have otherwise. As a (Fall 1996) K-12 major stated, "MPS has opened my mind to different cultures and the realization of differences between cultures. As a teacher of the future, I can use my open-mindedness to teach everyone without prejudice." This is certainly beneficial for

prospective teachers who may one day teach in an urban school, perhaps due to limited teaching opportunities in non-urban school districts. At the same time, a quality experience in an urban school setting is also useful to teachers who teach in non-urban schools but whose pupils may one day live and work in urban settings.

More importantly, the comments of students suggest a significant and healthy challenge to an image of teaching that is simplistic and monolithic. The comments create, instead, an image of teachers and teaching that is very complex and multi-faceted. Teachers do more than "teach" and effective teaching requires uncovering and responding to individual children and the package of background, learning style, and motivation to learn that they carry with them everyday through the schoolhouse door.

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